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ABSTRACT

The relationship between physical attractiveness and social competence is complex. A study was undertaken to assess the relationship between ratings of physical attractiveness and ratings of conversational skill. Sixty male and 60 female undergraduates viewed tapes depicting 18 heterosocial interactions. Subjects were asked to rate physical attractiveness, social competency, and their "desire to date" for each member of the opposite sex depicted on the tapes. One group of raters based their ratings on a brief 5-second exposure, while the remaining raters viewed the entire 3-minute interaction before rating attractiveness. The results indicated that for females' ratings of male attractiveness there was a significant stimulus subject by rating condition interaction. Socially competent males were deemed more attrative provided they were seen in action. Males' ratings of female attractiveness were relatively independent of rating condition. Overall, males attributed higher levels of social competence to attractive females than females attributed to attractive males. This sex difference was minimal when behaviorally influenced attractiveness ratings were employed. These findings highlight the importance of considering the sex of the rater and ratee and the manner in which attractiveness ratings are obtained in studying the beauty-good relationship. (Author/NB)

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Sex as a Moderator of the Beauty Good Relationship*

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Running Head ATTRACTIVENESS AND COMPETENCY

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Sex as a Moderator

of the Beauty-Good Relationship

Sixty male and 60 female undergraduates were asked to rate tapes depicting 18 heterosocial interactions. One group of raters based attractiveness ratings on a brief 5 second exposure, while the remaining raters viewed the entire 3 minute interaction before rating attractiveness. For females' ratings of male attractiveness there was a significant stimulus subject by rating condition interaction. Socially competent males were deemed more attractive providing they were seen in action. Males' ratings of female attractiveness were independent of rating condition. Overall, males attributed higher levels of social competence to attractive females. Attention is drawn to the sex of the rater and the ratee in examining the directionality of the beauty-good relationship.

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Sex as a Moderator of the Beauty-Good Relationship

The relationship between physical attractiveness and social competence is complex. While there is ample support for the validity of the "What is Beautiful is Good" finding (Dion, 1972), others have pointed out that social desirability may also affect perceived attractiveness. Gross and Crofton (1977) found that photographs of females described by favorable personality traits were deemed significantly more attractive than identical photos associated with less desirable traits. This finding was replicated for photographs of females, but not for photos of males (Owens & Ford, 1978). In addition, with time, people appear to convince themselves that their heterosocial partner is attractive (Critelli & Waid, 1980). This study was designed to assess the relationship between ratings of physical attractiveness and ratings of conversational skill.

One area in which attractive individuals are expected to excel is in their goal-directed interactions with members of the opposite sex (Dermer & Thiel, 1975). Reis et al. (1982) have argued convincingly that attractive persons may be differentially reinforced for conforming to these expectations. Consequently, the stereotype may be confirmed by means of a self-fulfilling prophecy. From the perspective of members of the opposite sex it could be that: (a) attractive people <u>seem to be</u> socially skilled (b) attractive people <u>are</u> socially skilled or (c) socially skilled

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people appear to be attractive.

The relationship between physical attractiveness and social competency may also be moderated by target and rater sex. The standards of attractiveness have been argued to be less clearly defined for males than for females (Barocas & Vance, 1974) and may be a less salient dimension for female ratings of males. In the absence of consensual criteria or saliency, agreement among female raters (rating male attractiveness) would be lower than among males (rating female attractiveness) and would be more likely to be influenced by extraneous factors such as the male target's social competence. Conversely, attractiveness has been argued to be a salient dimension in evaluations of females and influences a variety of other rated attributes. For example, Bar-Tul and Saxe (1976) reported that the halo effect was more pronounced for attractive females, who benefit from a group of positive attributions. It follows that the sex of the rater and ratee would moderate the direction of the beauty-good relationship. Males would deem beautiful females competent, whether due to an actual or perceived relationship between these constructs. Females would find competent males more beautiful, providing males had an opportunity to be seen in action.

In summary, the following predictions were made concerning hypothesized sex differences in the beauty-good relationship: (1) For females' ratings of males, social competency will influence perceived attractiveness but will be unrelated to

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competency-biased ratings of physical attractiveness, (2) For males' ratings of females, attractiveness will be positively associated with competency regardless of when attractiveness ratings are obtained.

METHOD

Subjects

All subjects were undergraduate students who received credit towards the completion of introductory psychology course requirements in exchange for their participation. Potential target subjects (55 females, 55 males) were videotaped for viewing by an independent sample of 60 males and 60 females. From the available target tapes, 18 dyads were selected to represent an adequate range of social competency based upon self-report measures (i.e., SHI: Twentyman & McFall, 1975; SHI-F: Williams & Ciminero, 1978).

Procedure

Target subjects had been asked to role play a situation in which they were getting to know someone they had just met at the student union. These naturalistic heterosocial interactions were videotaped and the selected dyads were copied onto stimulus tapes. Stimulus tapes depicted waist up views of target subjects. They were constructed so as to allow for manipulation of the independent variable: the length of exposure to stimulus subjects when attractiveness ratings were obtained. This was done by copying brief and extended segments of original stimulus tapes and

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presenting them as follows.

All subjects were asked to rate physical attractiveness, social competency, and their "desire to date" for each member of the opposite sex depicted. In the brief exposure condition, half of the subjects (30 females, 30 males) rated attractiveness after viewing the target's 5 second segment. The raters then viewed the target's 3 minute extended interaction before completing ratings of competency and datability. The remaining subjects (extended exposure condition) viewed the 3 minute interaction before being shown the 5 second segment. These subjects then rated physical attractiveness, competency, and datability (in the same sequence as the brief exposure condition).

RESULTS

The overall design consisted of two between group factors (raters nested in condition and condition) and one within group factor (stimulus subjects). For attractiveness ratings, analyses of variance were computed separately for raters of each sex. Condition and stimulus subjects were fixed factors and raters was a random factor. Main effects for condition were not significant: targets were equally attractive under both conditions. As predicted, for females' ratings of males' physical attractiveness there was a significant interaction between rating condition (brief vs. extended exposure) and stimulus subjects, who varied in their level of social competency $F(1,17) = 3.24$, $p<.001$. The corresponding interaction was not significant for males' ratings

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of females' physical attractiveness F(1,17) = 1.48, n.s.

One concern was that initial differences in the distribution of male versus female attractiveness would preclude comparisons across sexes. However, results indicate that under the brief exposure condition male raters saw as much difference among female stimuli as female raters saw among male stimuli. Utilizing the F max ratio (Winer, 1971), differences in the brief exposure variances were nonsignificant, F max (2,17) = 1.18. Furthermore, disagreements among raters as measured by the ANOVA error term for each sex were also homogeneous across sexes under this conditon, F max (2,493) = 1.09; and across conditions for males rating females, F max (2,493) = 1.08. However, disagreements among females rating males were not homogeneous across conditons, F max (2,493) = 2.01, p<.01.

Table 1 About Here

To determine whether female judges were being influenced by their perceptions of social competency, mean attractiveness ratings were computed using mean competency ratings as a post hoc grouping variable. The six most highly skilled males received attractiveness ratings that were on an average .69 scale points higher when obtained after the interaction. The six most highly skilled females received an average increment of only .14 scale points under the extended exposure condition.

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Table 2 About Here

Intercorrelations between mean ratings of target subject attractiveness, skill and desire to date were computed within conditions for raters of each sex. For males rating females, the correlation between attractiveness and skill ratings was comparatively high under both conditions. For females rating males, however, essentially no correlation was found between attractiveness and skill under the brief exposure condition. A moderate correlation between females' ratings of these two variables was obtained under the extended exposure condition. A Chi Square test (Hayes, 1973:664) revealed significant differences between the correlations of attractiveness and skill as depicted in Table 2, x^2 (3) = 7.94, $p<.05$. More specific tests indicated no significant differences between any two of these correlations. It appears that the Chi Square was indicating that the correlation for brief exposure female raters ($r = -.07$), was different from the remaining group of moderate correlations.

Results raised questions regarding what female ratings of male attractiveness actually encompass. Overall, however, there was no less agreement regarding where males stood on this dimension. Unit reliabilities based on intraclass correlations were consistent with those reported in the literature ($r = .53$ for females rating males, $r = .41$ for males rating females). Unit

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reliabilities of competency ratings were somewhat lower than those obtained in staged interactions, but overall reliability was more than adequate (r = .96, r = .95). Moderate correlations with target subjects scores on self-report measures provided support for the external validity of social competency ratings.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to assess the relationship between ratings of conversational skill and physical attractiveness. As predicted, rating conditions had a significant affect on females' ratings of male attractiveness. The significant stimulus subject by rating condition interaction and the difference in correlations across conditions both support this interpretation. Male ratings of female attractiveness were relatively independent of rating condition. Overall, males attributed higher levels of social competence to attractive females than females attributed to attractive males. This sex difference was minimal, however, when behaviorally influenced attractiveness ratings were employed.

These results highlight the importance of considering the sex of the rater and ratee and the manner in which attractiveness ratings are obtained in studying the "beauty-good" relationship. Monroe et al, (1981) likewise reported that physical attractiveness did not affect ratings of male social competence. Thus at least in the case of males as rated by females, the reciprocity of the beauty-good relationship should be recognized (Owens & Ford, 1978). Further study is necessary to determine if

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"what is good is also beautiful" applies to males' rating of males or even females' ratings of females as well.

One plausible explanation for the results obtained is that the criteria for male beauty are less clearly defined than they are for female beauty. However, females actually exhibited slightly higher levels of interrater agreement in rating male attractiveness than did males in rating female attractiveness. As Rand and Hall (1983) pointed out, this argues against the "vague criteria" explanation. Instead, it appears that females are more likely to incorporate available verbal and/or nonverbal cues (e.g., smile, posture, energy level, anxiety level) in arriving at ratings of male attractivenes, while males tend to rely upon initial impressions or a more static mental image.

Judging from males' ratings of competency, attractive females appeared to benefit from a more pronounced halo effect. Alternatively, perhaps they may be more skilled because of more frequent opportunities for rehearsal. Yet Reis et al. (1982) found that for females, the quantity of socializing with males was unrelated to physical attractiveness. In this study, attractiveness accounted for most of the variance in ratings of desire to date for members of either sex. This suggests that in the real world a fear of rejection may take precedence resulting in some form of matching (e.g., Berscheid et al., 1971). Perceived attractiveness, competency, or even desirability need not necessarily translate into high dating frequency.

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These results suggest that caution must be exercised when comparing findings regarding physical attractiveness. Some have avoided confounding attractiveness with behavior, but others have obtained ratings after an interaction or even an extended computer dance (e.g., Tesser & Brodie, 1971; Glasgow & Arkowitz, 1975). In piloting this study, even brief exposure judges stated they in part relied upon aspects of behavior (e.g., posture, smile) in assessing attractiveness. Photographs introduce some operationalization and consensus, but are also artifical. Self-ratings have also been proposed (Lucker et al., 1981), yet indications are that males in particular are unaware of their own objectively rated attractiveness (Rand & Hall, 1983).

The integration of appearance related cues into dating decisions also merits further investigation. Stage theorists would predict that stimulus cues become less salient, serving as a first filter of sorts (Murstein, 1977). Yet Mathes (1975) found that attractive persons were liked progressively more than their less attractive counterparts as time progressed. In response, stage theorists could argue that differences became more extreme because subjects were compelled to continue dating those who normally would be screened out based upon stimulus characteristics alone. Innovative methodologies are necessary to provide solutions to these problems.

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Table 1. Variances of Attractiveness Ratings by Sex and Stimulus Condition

		Males	Females
	Source df	rating females	rating males
Brief	Rater (29)	.452	.255
Exposure	Stimulus Subject (17)	1.275	1.485
	Rater x Stimulus (493)	1.549	1.415
Extended	Rater (29)	.488	.042
Exposure	Stimulus Subject (17)	1.058	.684
	Rater x Stimulus (493)	1.676	2.851

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Table 2. Intercorrelations of

Attractiveness, Skill and Desire to Date

Condition	Att-Ski	Att-Des	Ski-Des
Males Rating Females			
Brief	.52	.86	.82
Extended	.54	.97	.63
Females Rating Males			
Brief	-.07	.82	.39
Extended	.41	.97	.50

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